

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 3, 2018

Dear Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo:

We write on World Press Freedom Day to express solidarity with you in the face of grave injustice as you remain wrongfully detained. The decision by Burmese authorities to arrest and seek charges against you for your reporting is extremely dangerous and a blatant attack on freedom of expression in Burma. We have and will continue to urge Burmese authorities to immediately and unconditionally release you and drop any potential charges levied against you, as you yearn for a democratic Burma that celebrates and protects press freedom and journalists like yourselves.

In December 2017, you both took a courageous step by shining a light on the horrific abuses that had occurred in the village of Inn Din, Rakhine State. Burmese authorities have gone to great lengths to cover up any evidence of the brutal military crackdown in August 2017, against the Rohingya that forced nearly 700,000 people to flee to Bangladesh. However, your reporting on Inn Din prompted a rare acknowledgement of wrongdoing by Burmese military officials. This was a shocking but important accounting as Burmese authorities had restricted and continue to restrict access to Rakhine State. As such, it's no surprise that your incredible reporting was recognized through several prestigious honors, including the National Press Club's Aubuchon Press Freedom Award, the Reuters Baron Award, and the PEN America Barbey Freedom to Write Award.

It is clear that your arrests have been politically motivated due to your reporting. Proceedings against you outrageously continue despite a key witness recently admitting in court that police officers were instructed to plant evidence and "trap" the two of you for arrest on fake charges. Unfortunately, your arrests are also part of a larger clampdown on independent media in Burma, where journalists live with the constant fear of harassment, intimidation, or detention. The continued deterioration of press freedom in the country remains an impediment to a full transition to democracy, and we will continue to highlight any attempts by the government to stifle freedom of speech and press in Burma. As friends of the people of Burma, it is our hope that Burma changes its course and drops any potential charges against you and releases you both without delay.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers." While Burma was one of the original countries to vote to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Burmese government has ignored those rights in recent years.

Please know, the United States and the international community are watching your case very closely. As we recommit ourselves to upholding the fundamental principles of a free press on World Press Freedom Day, we stand with you and all journalists around the world who remain

unjustly imprisoned for their work. And we will continue to support you and all those in Burma who share your vision for democracy and human rights in the country.

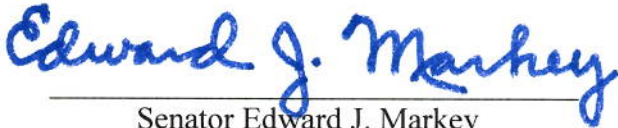
Sincerely,



Senator Richard J. Durbin



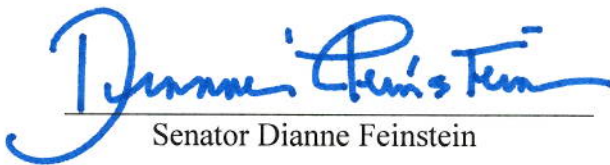
Senator Marco Rubio



Senator Edward J. Markey




Senator Todd Young



Senator Dianne Feinstein



Senator Ted Cruz



Senator Christopher A. Coons



Senator Tim Kaine



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley